

## Gulf of Tonkin

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30-Year Anniversary: Tonkin Gulf Lie Launched Vietnam War

By Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon

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<http://www.whatreallyhappened.com/RANCHO/CRASH/TWA/TONKIN.html>

Thirty years ago, it all seemed very clear.

"American Planes Hit North Vietnam After Second Attack on Our Destroyers; Move Taken to Halt New Aggression", announced a Washington

Post headline on Aug. 5, 1964.

That same day, the front page of the New York Times reported: "President Johnson has ordered retaliatory action against gunboats and 'certain supporting facilities in North Vietnam' after renewed attacks against American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin."

But there was no "second attack" by North Vietnam -- no "renewed attacks against American destroyers." By reporting official claims as absolute truths, American journalism opened the floodgates for the bloody Vietnam War.

A pattern took hold: continuous government lies passed on by pliant mass media...leading to over 50,000 American deaths and millions of Vietnamese casualties.

The official story was that North Vietnamese torpedo boats launched an "unprovoked attack" against a U.S. destroyer on "routine patrol" in the Tonkin Gulf on Aug. 2 -- and that North Vietnamese PT boats followed up with a "deliberate attack" on a pair of U.S. ships two days later.

The truth was very different.

Rather than being on a routine patrol Aug. 2, the U.S. destroyer Maddox was actually engaged in aggressive intelligence-gathering manoeuvres -- in sync with coordinated attacks on North Vietnam by the South Vietnamese navy and the Laotian air force.

"The day before, two attacks on North Vietnam...had taken place," writes scholar Daniel C. Hallin. Those assaults were "part of a campaign of increasing military pressure on the North that the United States had been pursuing since early 1964."

On the night of Aug. 4, the Pentagon proclaimed that a second attack by North Vietnamese PT boats had occurred earlier that day in the Tonkin Gulf -- a report cited by President Johnson as he went on national TV that evening to announce a momentous escalation in the war: air strikes against North Vietnam.

But Johnson ordered U.S. bombers to "retaliate" for a North Vietnamese torpedo attack that never happened.

Prior to the U.S. air strikes, top officials in Washington had reason to doubt that any Aug. 4 attack by North Vietnam had occurred. Cables from the U.S. task force commander in the Tonkin Gulf, Captain John J. Herrick, referred to "freak weather effects," "almost total darkness" and an "overeager sonarman" who "was

hearing ship's own propeller beat."

One of the Navy pilots flying overhead that night was squadron commander James Stockdale, who gained fame later as a POW and then Ross Perot's vice presidential candidate. "I had the best seat in the house to watch that event," recalled Stockdale a few years ago, "and our destroyers were just shooting at phantom targets -- there were no PT boats there.... There was nothing there but black water and American fire power."

In 1965, Lyndon Johnson commented: "For all I know, our Navy was shooting at whales out there."

But Johnson's deceitful speech of Aug. 4, 1964, won accolades from editorial writers. The president, proclaimed the New York Times, "went to the American people last night with the sombre facts." The Los Angeles Times urged Americans to "face the fact that the Communists, by their attack on American vessels in international waters, have themselves escalated the hostilities."

An exhaustive new book, *The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam*, begins with a dramatic account of the Tonkin Gulf incidents. In an interview, author Tom Wells told us that American media "described the air strikes that Johnson launched in response as merely 'tit for tat' -- when in reality they reflected plans the administration had already drawn up for gradually increasing its overt military pressure against the North."

Why such inaccurate news coverage? Wells points to the media's "almost exclusive reliance on U.S. government officials as sources of information" -- as well as "reluctance to question official pronouncements on 'national security issues.'"

Daniel Hallin's classic book *The 'Uncensored War'* observes that journalists had "a great deal of information available which contradicted the official account [of Tonkin Gulf events]; it simply wasn't used. The day before the first incident, Hanoi had protested the attacks on its territory by Laotian aircraft and South Vietnamese gunboats."

What's more, "It was generally known...that 'covert' operations against North Vietnam, carried out by South Vietnamese forces with U.S. support and direction, had been going on for some time."

In the absence of independent journalism, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution -- the closest thing there ever was to a declaration of war against North Vietnam -- sailed through Congress on Aug. 7. (Two courageous senators, Wayne Morse of Oregon and Ernest Gruening of Alaska, provided the only "no" votes.) The resolution authorized the president "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression."

The rest is tragic history.

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<http://images.maariv.co.il/channels/1/ART/520/136.html>

[Translated from the Hebrew by Sol Salbe.]

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Bush's Bay of Tonkin  
Meier Schnitzer

Tomorrow, 7 August is the day Americans mark the anniversary of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. This was the sole legal basis upon which hundreds of thousands of soldiers were sent to fight in faraway Vietnam.

The resolution was carried by a crushing majority (88 senators for, and only two against). It authorised President Johnson to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression". With the overwhelming backing of the Senate, Johnson authorised the massive aerial bombardment of North Vietnamese cities. What followed afterwards would be familiar to all from the hundred of thousands of books, films, newspaper article that have dealt with and continue to deal with that unnecessary war.

The resolution was preceded by two serious incidents of exchanges of fire that took place in the Gulf of Tonkin that in those days separated the communist north from the US protectorate in the south. In the both incidents North Vietnamese torpedo boats had attacked two US destroyers that were on a goodwill mission to the bay.

Time magazine excelled in its description of the incidents: "Through the darkness, from the West and South, the intruders boldly sped. There were at least six of them, Russian-designed Swatow gunboats armed with 37-mm and 28-mm guns, and P-4's. At 9.52 they opened fire on the destroyers with automatic weapons, and this time from as close as 2,000 yards. The night glowed eerily with the nightmarish glare of air dropped flares and boat's searchlights. Two of the enemy boats went down. " Truly a warlike drama that instantly aroused patriotic fervour in the hearts of the majority of the Senate members.

The only problem with the entire regaling of the story is that the incidents never took place. Or as former Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee put it: "There was no battle. There was not a single intruder, never mind six of them. Never mind Russian designed Swatow gunboats armed with 37mm and 28mm guns. They never opened fire. They never sank. They never fired torpedoes. They never were."

There is no point in wasting words. Put simply the United States launched an unnecessary war (in which it was defeated) because of a pervasive calculated lie. The Pentagon and the State Department spread this lie. It was a lie that fooled even the most experienced of Senate members. The disclosure of the deception, three years later, caused the eventual departure of the Texan Johnson from the White House.

Altogether 39 years have passed since the fatal Senate resolution. Each year the American people are reminded of that horrible mistake. What's special about the current anniversary is that it is the first since the US armed forces were sent to fight Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Every day that passes without any proof of the existence of Weapons of Mass Destruction, the one and only official reason for the war, brings forth an increased usage of terms like lies and manipulative deception.

Each day brings closer the political demise of George W Bush - also a President from Texas.